



Final Honors

The Wright brothers were the most memorialized of Americans in the 20th century. Of all their countrymen, only Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln have inspired commemorative zeal to match.

Wright biographer Tom Crouch

To perfect a flying machine was nothing short of a miracle. Dayton's two most famous sons were soon hailed throughout the world for making the ancient dream of flight a reality.

After Wilbur Wright died unexpectedly in 1912, prominent Dayton leaders initially thought that Huffman Prairie Flying Field, which you can see from this bluff, would be the best place to build a memorial.

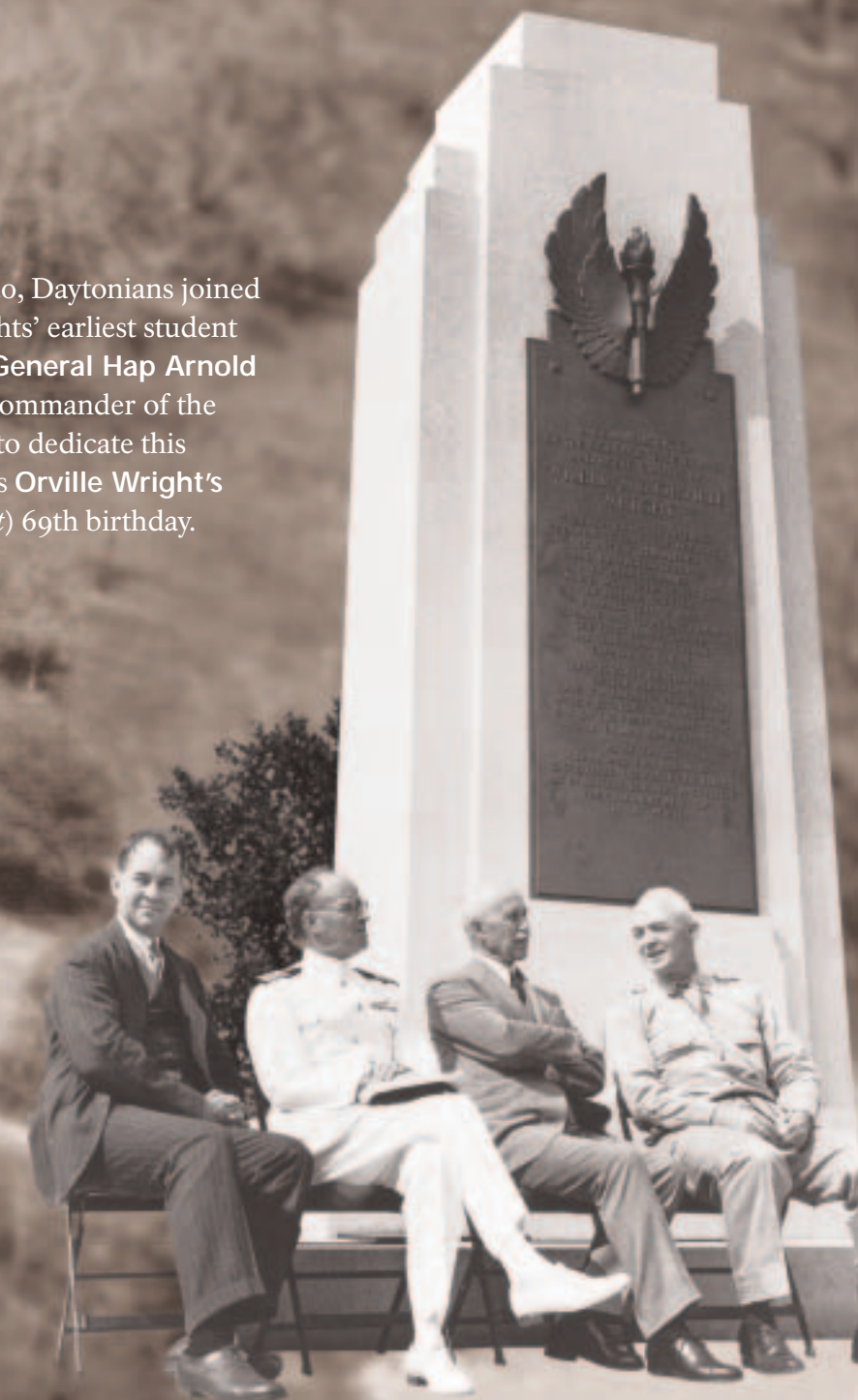
The committee wanted a simple, classic design “thoroughly in keeping with the unassuming modesty of Wilbur and Orville Wright.”

But the devastation of a great flood in 1913 postponed efforts to build any monument until 1938. This Wright Memorial fittingly overlooks the place where their greatest work was done.

On August 19, 1940, Daytonians joined some of the Wrights' earliest student flyers, including General Hap Arnold (*right*), then the commander of the Army Air Corps, to dedicate this monument. It was Orville Wright's (*second from right*) 69th birthday.



Civilian Conservation Corps crews helped the Miami Conservancy District build this memorial between 1938 and 1940. The Conservancy gave the memorial to the Air Force in 1978, in celebration of the 75th anniversary of powered flight.



Photograph provided by Wright State University, Special Collections and Archives



Cow Pasture to Flight School

Look two miles beyond this overlook to see a true cradle of aviation. The flags you see far below outline a pasture that became the first airport in history.

After their success at Kitty Hawk, the Wright brothers returned to Dayton. Looking for a “flying field” closer to home, they relocated to the rough pasture of Torrence Huffman’s farm in the valley below. In 1904–05, flying 40 feet high over Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the Wrights solved the complex problems of controlling a machine in powered flight: how to turn, bank, launch, and land.

Here is the pasture where the world’s first airplane pilots learned to fly.



Trainee Pilots at Huffman Prairie Flying Field

In 1910 the Wrights returned to this same pasture to start their **School of Aviation**—the world’s first permanent flight school. Many pilots, both military and civilian, who would shape the future of aviation first took to the air here.



Look for the flying field between here and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base’s active runways you see in the distance. You may be able to make out the flags which show the flying field’s historic boundaries.



Biplanes to Rocket Science

Here, on Wright Brothers Hill, on all sides you are surrounded by the vast research complexes and runways of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Problem solving done here since 1917 has taken aviators from Huffman Prairie Flying Field to the moon and back.

In the early 1920s, McCook Field near downtown Dayton proved too small to be safe for further experimental aircraft work. Community leaders formed the Dayton Air Service Committee, buying the lands surrounding this bluff and donating them to the federal government in 1924. Wright Field was then built, keeping the Army Air Corps engineering braintrust in town.

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base remains America’s premier center for aeronautical research, development, and acquisition, continuing engineering traditions that Orville and Wilbur Wright started when they first learned how to fly over these same fields in 1904.



You Are Here

Huffman Prairie
Flying Field
1904-5

Patterson Field 1917

The airfield you see ahead honors Lt. Frank S. Patterson, a test pilot killed in a crash in 1918. At that time, the base was called Wilbur Wright Field.

Wright Field 1927

Combat aircraft for World War II were designed at Wright Field. Experimental warplanes were test-flown from both fields in the 1940s.



Spacesuits worn by early astronauts, such as Ohioan John Glenn (*second right*), were developed at Wright-Patterson in the 1960s.

Early development work on the Space Shuttle was also done here.





In Case of Floods...

Huffman Prairie Flying Field lies to the right of the **Huffman Dam**, the long earthen barrier you see below. The dam is one of five ‘retarding basins’ built by the Miami Conservancy District after the catastrophic 1913 flood. This dam, along with many miles of riverbank levees, protects downtown Dayton from future inundation.

Because the land behind this dam can go underwater if the Mad River should rise, and because there are active Air Force runways nearby, Torrence Huffman’s pasture has never been developed. Today’s visitors can see the oldest of all flying fields much as the Wright brothers would have known it in the early years of the 20th century.

Dayton — March 23, 1913

Near the Wright brothers’ home in West Dayton, flood waters reached 12 feet deep. In one week, 371 lives and property worth \$100 million were lost.

